



SIERRA CLUB

Connecticut Chapter
P.O. Box 270595
West Hartford, Connecticut 06127
connecticut.sierraclub.org

March 7, 2023

Dear Senator Needleman, Representative Steinberg, Senator McCrory, Representative Foster, Senator Fazio, Representative Buckbee and members of the Energy and Technology Committee,

On behalf of the Sierra Club and our more than 40,000 members and supporters in Connecticut, thank you for the opportunity to testify on bills before the Committee today.

The Sierra Club is committed to defending everyone's right to a healthy world by tackling the serious challenges of a warming climate and unprecedented levels of pollution. A rapid and equitable transition to clean and renewable energy is our powerful tool to address both of these issues. Connecticut must focus on critically needed strategies to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the most polluting sources - buildings, transportation and electricity generation. This means passing laws that require Connecticut to achieve clear and measurable steps towards a 100% renewable electricity sector, efficient and fossil free buildings, and zero-emission transportation.

Sierra Club recommends changes to HB 6848, An Act Concerning Gas Leak Detectors in New and Existing Construction, to develop effective policies to eliminate gas leaks. Fossil gas piped into homes is primarily composed of methane, a short-lived, but potent greenhouse gas that has more than 80 times more heat-trapping potential than carbon dioxide in its first 20 years. It has been implicated in accelerating the climate crisis, and is harmful to human health.

Leaking gas is a well-known problem that is well-documented. Here's a few of the recent findings: 15% of total gas methane emissions in California could be attributed to fugitive post-meter (i.e., in-home) emissions.¹ 75% of total emissions from gas stoves and storage water heaters originate while they are off.²

To effectively address this issue, we must go beyond detection and prevent the leaks in the first place. We recommend that this bill be amended to 1) require that all new and existing construction prohibit the use of gas appliances and equipment, and 2) that zero nitrogen oxide (NOx) emission standard be established to require any new appliances sold in the state to meet it.

With these changes, Connecticut can eliminate gas leaks inside homes.

Sierra Club supports HB 6852, An Act Concerning the Affordability of Utilities. The statewide average energy burden (household energy expenditures like electric, gas, heating fuel divided by annual household income) is 3%, while most of our cities experience rates of 6% or higher. Household energy burden that's higher than 6% is considered high and anything above 10% is considered severe. Two recent studies have illustrated the impacts of high energy burden in Connecticut. The Trinity College Action Lab reported on the energy burden in Hartford's Upper Albany neighborhood where the average energy burden is 7.6% but can be as high as 27%.³ "Energy Justice and Health in a Changing Climate" by the Yale School of Public Health's Center on Climate Change and Health, the Vermont Law

¹ <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.8b03217>

² <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.9b07189>

³ <https://action-lab.org/energyburdenhftd/report/>

Connecticut Chapter
P.O. Box 270595
West Hartford, Connecticut 06127
connecticut.sierraclub.org

& Graduate School, and Operation Fuel also highlighted the impacts of energy burden.⁴ In August 2022, before the recent rate increase, the Office of Consumer Council reported that 420,000 customers were 30 days behind on electric and gas bills.⁵

At the same time, our state's largest utility, Eversource, reported \$1.4 billion in profit in 2022, \$1.22 billion in 2021, \$1.21 billion in 2020, and \$909.1 million in 2019.⁶

Much needs to be done to reign in profits and lower costs. Sierra Club supports HB 6852 including Section 3 that limits reconnection fees at \$100, Sierra Club recommends a prohibition on reconnection fees; Section 4 that establishes a shut off moratorium for hardship customers on high heat days, and Section 5 that establishes a Low Income Discount Rate for gas and water.

Sierra Club opposes HB 6851, An Act Implementing Recommendations of the Hydrogen Task Force as written. The production and use of clean hydrogen in Connecticut must be very carefully developed. Done wrong, clean hydrogen will be incredibly costly and increase greenhouse gas emissions. Recognizing this, the Hydrogen Task Force report clearly identifies "decarbonization of hard-to-electrify, including long-haul trucking, aviation, shipping, and industrial processes" as the appropriate use of clean hydrogen. The Task Force report also clearly identifies end uses that do not fall into the "hard-to-electrify" category, including building heating and passenger vehicles.

Section 4 of HB 6851 creates a broad tax exemption for any end-use. It is inconsistent with the Task Force recommendations, and would give exemptions to end-uses technologies that would be better suited for electrification.

Section 1(b) of HB 6851 requires the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to define clean hydrogen. This section of the bill could be strengthened to specify that clean hydrogen sources should include only non-fossil fuel, 100% zero-carbon feedstock, and that clean hydrogen end-uses be restricted to hard-to-decarbonize end uses where electrification is not a viable option.

Sierra Club opposes SB 1170, An Act Concerning the Procurement of Zero-Carbon Resources From Eligible Nuclear Power Generating Facilities. Nuclear power is dangerous, costly, and pursued at the detriment of true renewables like wind, solar and battery; Sierra Club opposes efforts to increase the use of nuclear power. Additionally, DEEP already has statutorily mandated reports for energy procurements and planning including the Integrated Resource Plan for the procurement of energy resources (Sec. 16a-3a) and the Comprehensive Energy Strategy (Sec. 16a-3d).

Thank you for your attention to these important issues and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,
Samantha Dynowski, State Director
Sierra Club Connecticut

⁴https://ysph.yale.edu/yale-center-on-climate-change-and-health/policy-and-public-health-practice/energy%20justice%20in%20ct%20report_443325_284_48542_v1.pdf

⁵https://www.journalinquirer.com/connecticut_and_region/420k-customers-behind-on-energy-bills/article_01b77a56-286e-11ed-916b-071ab75a8dae.html

⁶[https://ctexaminer.com/2023/02/14/eversource-reports-another-consecutive-year-of-profits-1-4-billion-in-2022/#:~:text=Eversource%20reported%20that%20its%20electric,stayd%20flat%20at%20\\$2436.7%20million.](https://ctexaminer.com/2023/02/14/eversource-reports-another-consecutive-year-of-profits-1-4-billion-in-2022/#:~:text=Eversource%20reported%20that%20its%20electric,stayd%20flat%20at%20$2436.7%20million.)

Phone: (860) 578-4750 -- Email: Connecticut.chapter@sierraclub.org